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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 005600

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: CIVIC FORCE: A KREMLIN EXPERIMENT GONE NOWHERE

REF: A. MOSCOW 05417

[1](#)B. MOSCOW 03841

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reason: 1.4 (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The political party Civic Force (GS) began life as a Kremlin project and has enjoyed the freedom of action and access to the media that come with that status. Unlike other small, right-wing parties (such as Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces (SPS)), who have encountered problems in conducting their election campaigns, GS's chief problems have been lack of voter recognition, a small campaign war chest, and the inability of GS leader Barshchevskiy to parlay his name-recognition value into votes for his party. As a result, GS will join Yabloko and SPS as an also ran on December 2, and is unlikely to get even the three percent of the vote necessary for continued federal financing. End summary.

Free From Kremlin Interference

[1](#)2. (C) In a November 15 conversation, Civic Force party (GS) Press Spokesman Aleksandr Agamov acknowledge that GS had encountered no administrative resistance to its campaign. Unlike Yabloko and SPS (ref A), GS has been able to contract for the printing and distribution of campaign materials, has not had its regional party offices vandalized, and has not been harassed by Kremlin-friendly youth groups like "Nashi." GS Chairman Barshchevskiy appears frequently on national television, both during the national debates transmitted free-of-charge by the federal channels, and on the channels' various talk shows.

[1](#)3. (C) Lack of Kremlin interference, has not meant Kremlin assistance, however. Agamov complained that as a small, new party GS had not been able to attract the financial resources necessary to pay for expensive television time, billboards, and for printing literature.

[1](#)4. (C) Agamov told us that GS had done little advertising in Moscow because of the expense, and the cost meant that buying television time was not seriously considered, forcing the party to conduct a "virtual" campaign over the internet. Instead, the party had concentrated its TV ads on the regions where, unfortunately, it has little name recognition.

A Failed Experiment

[1](#)5. (U) Agamov admitted that GS had been a Kremlin experiment

from the start. GS began with the blessing of the Kremlin, and may have been initially designed to thwart the efforts of Yabloko and/or SPS. Its efforts have continued to receive the blessing of Presidential Administration Deputy Head Vladislav Surkov (ref B). According to Agamov, the Kremlin's experiment was part of an attempt to give a voice to the middle class, whose interests did not lie with the Communist Party or United Russia.

¶6. (U) According to recent polls, GS is barely visible to the electorate. Levada Center has reported less than one percent of respondents indicating they would vote for GS. VTsIOM and FOM report similar results. All differences between these polling agencies are within the margin of error, and in fact the margin of error includes zero meaning, conceivably, that GS has no support among the electorate.

¶7. (C) Agamov did not hide behind excuses and optimistic rhetoric when discussing his party's chances. Although he did overestimate the response the party received in recent polls (he claimed three percent), he acknowledged that the party still faced a steep battle in getting to seven percent. He pointed out--wishfully, perhaps--that SPS was polling at 1.5 percent prior to the March regional elections, but ultimately received about seven percent. His optimism was keyed to undecided voters and the rumored tendency of Russians to change their minds in the voting booth.

¶8. (U) References to GS have been hard to find in the press. Over the past two weeks, only five mentions of the party were found and then only in the regions. One article, an op-ed piece by Party Chairman Mikhail Barshchevskiy discussed the potential consequences of the recently adopted law on local self-government. A second article from Chelyabinsk mentioned Viktor Pokhmelkin who recently left SR for GS, and has been

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spearheading an effort to improve road conditions and road safety in Russia. The remaining articles mentioned GS only in passing, barely noting the existence of the party.

A Complicated Relationship with Putin

¶9. (C) GS has not criticized Putin or his administration during the campaign, although the party's leadership has little affection for YR or Putin's more unliberal and undemocratic policies. GS has focused instead on a peaceful transfer of power that they expect will occur after the March 2008 elections. Putin's lame-duck status make criticism of him irrelevant.

¶10. (C) The GS leadership has, however, been willing to criticize United Russia (YR). According to Agamov, the majority of the Russian electorate, like Putin, knows that YR has been ineffective, but believe that tolerating its continued dominance is the price of stability. YR has been successful in parlaying the popular desire for continued stability into a vote for YR. GS, on the other hand, sees significant threats to continued stability in coming years including the bureaucracy to which YR is beholden.

Comment

¶11. (C) Civic Force began life as the Kremlin-orchestrated counter to Yabloko and SPS, but constraints on its ability to operate independently left it with little leverage and it has failed to register with the voters. As the fates of Just Russia and GS will likely show on December 2, launching a party in the current political environment without active Kremlin support has proven daunting.

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